STH 26 Corridor Plan

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Rock, Jefferson, Dodge Counties

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SEH

Wisconsin Department of Transportation

Executive Summary

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) District 1 contracted Short Elliott Hendrickson Inc. ® (SEH) to complete the STH 26 Corridor Plan. The Corridor Plan takes a long-term view of the highway system, local roads, and land use while presenting strategies and recommendations that state agencies and local governments could implement to keep the highway functioning safely and efficiently. The corridor planning process took place over a 24-month period that included intensive public involvement, comprehensive data collection, and land use and transportation planning analysis. The purpose of the Corridor Plan is to preserve the 70-mile segment of STH 26 between the city of Janesville, Wisconsin (I-90) and the city of Waupun, Wisconsin (USH 151) as a safe and efficient route well into the future.

Prior to the STH 26 Corridor Plan, a corridor study and an environmental impact statement (EIS) process were initiated to look at capacity improvements on STH 26 from I-90 in the city of Janesville to STH 60 north of the city of Watertown. The primary focus of the EIS process, started in 1999, was to document environmental, cultural, and socio-economic resources, and the impacts of capacity improvements on STH 26 on those resources. The STH 26 Corridor Plan did not change the decisions made as part of the EIS process pertaining to the preferred alternative, but did allow for more detailed analysis to occur including land use, access, local roads, and bike and pedestrian issues only briefly addressed in the EIS. The Corridor Plan complemented the decisions made through the EIS process.

The scope of this project was unique because it was initiated to help local communities prepare and plan for the changes that the future highway improvements will bring. Additionally, the Corridor Plan considered the STH 26 segment and adjacent communities between STH 60 and USH 151 where no major transportation projects were planned at the time.

The STH 26 Corridor Plan represented a new direction for WisDOT, offering a proactive approach that recognizes the important relationship between local land use decisions and state transportation facilities serving regional mobility needs. The Corridor Plan recognizes the importance of STH 26 to local communities and helps plan for the land use and other impacts of the expanded highway facility on those communities. It anticipates changes and relationships between transportation and land use pressures and provides strategies and recommendations that, if implemented, will help preserve the state's investment in the STH 26 corridor for many years to come.

Background and Overview

Over the 70-mile stretch between the city of Janesville and the city of Waupun, STH 26 passes through an area that has 24 local units of government including three counties, six cities, two villages, and thirteen towns. The level of comprehensive planning varies widely between the local units of government, as does the level of intergovernmental coordination. Because of the diversity between local units of government and the regional nature of many of the needs identified in the corridor, the STH 26 Corridor Plan focused on a collaborative planning and implementation approach for many of the strategies and recommendations.

Plan Development

The STH 26 Corridor Plan focuses on needs, strategies, and recommendations that fall into five categories: access management, local transportation systems, land use, interchange areas, and bike and pedestrian facilities.

The Corridor Plan commenced with a needs assessment phase that, with the assistance of local officials, residents, and business owners, identified important needs along the corridor through an intensive eight-month public involvement process. The needs identified were used to create plan concepts which then were further reviewed by officials representing the local units of government on the corridor. The plan concluded with the issuance of the *STH 26 Corridor Plan* report, which contains both corridor-wide and community-specific strategies and recommendations.

The strategies and recommendations of the Corridor Plan were intended for consideration by all governmental entities that will be affected by future improvements to STH 26. Many local communities will need to revisit their comprehensive plans to integrate corridor improvement plans into their local plans. Looking at both the strategies and recommendations and the improvements to STH 26 simultaneously in local planning efforts will further the system preservation approach of the STH 26 Corridor Plan.

Public Involvement and Outreach

Input from stakeholders was an important component of the STH 26 Corridor Plan. The general public was engaged at various points throughout the process and was offered multiple avenues to participate and contribute to the Corridor Plan. The public involvement component of the Corridor Plan included Assessment Panels (local officials and citizens), Public Information Booths at county fairs and Public Information Meetings. Education and outreach was an important part of the process and it culminated at the STH 26

Transportation/Land Use Planning Conference. A Technical Advisory Committee consisting of staff from local and state government agencies assisted in the Corridor Plan development. Plan implementation will be reviewed at annual update meetings with STH 26 communities.

Strategies And Recommendations

As previously mentioned, the strategies and recommendations in the STH 26 Corridor Plan fell into two categories: corridor-wide concepts that can be applied in most of the communities along STH 26, and community-specific strategies and recommendations that are geographically anchored to a specific deficiency or a future need.

Corridor-wide Strategies and Recommendations

The corridor-wide strategies and recommendations identified for the STH 26 corridor fall under three time frames: 0 - 3 years, 3 - 5 years, and 5 - 10 years. Many of the strategies and recommendations are interrelated and are presented as a comprehensive package, although many of them could be implemented individually to address priority needs in the study area.

The ten strategies and recommendations that follow have been organized according to interrelated transportation elements found within the study area. They were developed based on public input, technical analysis, and meetings with local officials.

1. Understand and Plan for Land Use Impacts of STH 26 Expansion, Bypasses, and Interchanges

Local communities adjacent to STH 26 should be proactive in understanding and preparing for the land use implications of three distinct transportation improvements relating to the STH 26 corridor: two- to four-lane expansion, highway bypasses, and new interchanges. Though all three are interrelated, they each present their own set of opportunities and challenges**.**

Two- to Four-lane Expansion

The STH 26 improvements include an expansion from two- to four-lanes from the city of Janesville to STH 60, just north of the city of Watertown. The impacts of the expansion on land use will stem from changed accessibility to land and decreased travel time between urban and rural areas. The most significant land use implications include increased development pressures on the urban fringe served by STH 26, increased property values, and changes in land ownership.

Highway Bypasses

Three communities will be bypassed as a result of planned STH 26 improvements. These communities include the cities of Milton, Jefferson, and Watertown. The city of Fort Atkinson, which was bypassed in the 1990's, will have its existing STH 26 bypass expanded from two- to four-lanes. The most significant potential impacts of new bypasses include a change in location, type and intensity of land uses, creation of a barrier effect in urban fringe areas, decreased traffic in downtown areas, and development proposals outpacing local government planning efforts along the new facility.

Interchange Development

Highway interchanges can have a tremendous impact on the intensity of development pressure in the surrounding area. Interchange areas are complex, affecting land use, property values, economic development, travel demands, local traffic circulation, and tax base. Stakeholders are equally complex and include local and state government, the general public, landowners, motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

2. Coordinate Local Comprehensive Planning with STH 26 Corridor Plan

Many communities in the project study area of the STH 26 Corridor Plan already have comprehensive plans in place, or are beginning the process of developing comprehensive plans. If a community is in the process of developing or revising its comprehensive plan, it is important that the community consider the impacts of the STH 26 improvements on local goals and initiatives. STH 26 is the primary north/south corridor for regional mobility, and its impacts to land use and local transportation systems require careful consideration. As communities update or prepare comprehensive plans, they should incorporate the strategies and recommendations of the STH 26 Corridor Plan into their plans. These comprehensive plans provide a basis for using the tools described below in #3.

3. Employ Tools to Balance Land Use and Transportation Systems

There are several planning and regulatory methods that communities can employ to balance the land use/transportation system. Of the tools presented in the Corridor Plan, intergovernmental agreements, and zoning/subdivision ordinances will be the most commonly used.

Intergovernmental Agreements

Communities are empowered under state law to cooperate in the provision of services in order to increase the efficiency of providing that service. Many of the issues facing communities along STH 26 are

regional in nature and require a joint effort to address them. Boundary agreements, corridor planning and revenue sharing are important intergovernmental efforts that will be needed to tackle regional issues.

Zoning/Subdivision Ordinances

Zoning and subdivision ordinances are the most common tools used by communities in the state to manage growth. In Wisconsin, communities also have extraterritorial zoning authority. Zoning and subdivision ordinances need to be transportation-friendly in order to ensure transportation systems compliment changes in land use.

4. Develop Functional Roadway Classification Systems and Local Traffic Circulation Plans

A balanced transportation system is based on a system of roadway types that serve access and mobility needs. The basic roadway facility types include arterials, collectors and local roads. When a community develops a functional roadway classification system it should consider its future access and mobility needs. Factors that should be considered include transportation system connectivity, land access, local circulation, and the relationship to planned land uses.

Once a community has developed a functional roadway classification system, it must ensure that it is supported by future land use decisions. Two important tools that help realize implementation include the comprehensive plan and the official map.

Comprehensive Plan

The transportation element of the comprehensive plan should contain the functional roadway classification system or traffic circulation plan under the jurisdiction of the community.

Official Map

Cities, villages, or towns with village powers can adopt official maps by ordinance or resolution through the state enabling legislation. Information depicted on the maps can include existing and planned future roads, historic districts, parkways, parks, railroad right-of-way and public transit facilities. Once adopted, new construction cannot infringe upon future planned corridors depicted on the official map.

5. Protect Functionality of STH 26 Interchanges

Primary access to the new STH 26 bypasses will likely be provided at interchanges. In addition to providing access to and from STH 26 itself, interchange areas must also accommodate local traffic circulation including short trips between adjacent land uses. Land use development should occur so that traffic circulation between land uses close to the interchange does not inhibit the interchange function of

providing access to/from STH 26. Interchange traffic circulation can be preserved by implementing joint access, cross access, on-site circulation, and frontage, backage, or service roads, all of which can increase the safety, efficiency and operations of the interchange area.

Even before the new STH 26 interchanges are constructed it is essential that these areas be proactively protected and preserved through a coordinated intergovernmental approach among local, county, and state governments. Existing land use and comprehensive plans should be revisited to account for the impact of proposed future interchanges on local land use and transportation systems.

6. Manage STH 26 Expressway Sections Over Time

The EIS improvements planned for STH 26 will convert much of the facility from an expressway to a freeway. The distinction is important because expressways have at-grade intersections and a limited number of access driveways. Conversely, freeways have no at-grade intersections or access driveways. The only access to freeways is at interchanges.

As land develops at or near existing at-grade intersections, WisDOT will consider grade-separating the intersecting roads to avoid interruptions to the STH 26 mainline in the long-term. If safety problems occur, the likely response by WisDOT will be to close the median, or construct an overpass or underpass.

Developers, landowners, and/or communities may perceive current at-grade intersections to be attractive locations for development. Before approving a development, communities should consider what the long-term impacts of removing access to STH 26 would be on the proposed development. Coordination with WisDOT is important in order to preserve the access needs of local communities to STH 26 throughout their growth.

7. Address Long-term Needs of STH 26 North of STH 60

Throughout the public involvement process of the STH 26 Corridor Plan, the public and local officials have expressed a high level of interest in the segment of STH 26 north of STH 60 (where the EIS improvements terminate). This northern segment is relatively rural and traffic currently drops off north of STH 60. However, it is possible that the highway expansion project south of STH 60 will result in increased traffic on the northern segment, as travelers divert from other routes onto the improved STH 26.

A STH 26 bypass of the city of Juneau following the current CTH A alignment has been proposed in the Dodge County Land Use Plan, but no formal discussion has occurred between WisDOT and the affected municipalities. To address the local concerns about the future of STH

26 north of STH 60, the formation of a local STH 26 committee is recommended. The agency which steps forward to organize the committee needs to have a clear understanding of the state process for planning major improvement projects.

8. Integrate Local and Regional Multi-modal Needs with the STH 26 Corridor Plan

Multi-modal elements such as bike, pedestrian, snowmobile, and other trails have been identified as important to the local transportation system and quality of life for communities along STH 26. The importance of these facilities is apparent in state, county, and local trail and land use plans. Ideally, these facilities would be integrated and connected to create a continuous system of trails and designated routes within the region.

In the cities of Milton, Jefferson, and Watertown where the entire city will be bypassed, the new alignment has the potential to affect multi-modal transportation needs. One impact that communities and WisDOT can work collaboratively to avoid is the barrier effect. In reference to transportation projects, the barrier effect is created when a new or expanded highway separates adjacent land uses. The barrier effect can be psychological or physical. In communities where residential growth is planned on both sides of STH 26 (either the existing or new alignment), special consideration should be given to linking the developments and avoiding the barrier effect.

9. Protect Natural and Scenic Resources on STH 26

The STH 26 improvements, particularly the bypasses, will create a profound visual and physical environmental change to the landscape. Working collaboratively, communities and WisDOT can maximize the benefits of this project by identifying scenic viewsheds from the perspective of existing and new transportation facilities. In addition to protecting the already identified significant areas, wetlands, archeological sites, and historical sites should also be identified for preservation. WisDOT and local units of government can also employ Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) methodology to new transportation and other construction projects to preserve or enhance existing aesthetic resources.

10. Minimize STH 26 Impacts on Agriculture

Both positive and negative impacts will result from the conversion of agricultural land to road right-of-way and more intense land uses such as industrial and residential development. Issues of increasing importance to agriculture along STH 26 will include access to agricultural fields, impacts of erosion and storm water drainage from the highway expansion project new development, and conversion of

land from agriculture to other uses. Communities should ensure the continued viability of agriculture through local zoning ordinances, siting complementary land uses in agricultural areas, and enhancing local market opportunities.

Effective techniques that can be employed to slow the reduction of agricultural land use include conservation easements, purchase of development rights (PDR) programs and transfer of development rights (TDR) programs, and agriculture zoning used in conjunction with development clustering techniques and/or density limits.

The economic viability of agricultural enterprises can also be enhanced through various techniques. Some of the techniques include diversification of commodity production, modernization of production and equipment, energy production, and promotion of value-added industries.

Community-specific Strategies and Recommendations

In addition to the corridor-wide strategies and recommendations, community-specific strategies and recommendations were developed. The community-specific strategies and recommendations are grouped together by specific areas delineated by project maps. Thirteen project maps were created to help facilitate the public involvement process. The maps span the entire 70-mile corridor and each map covers a distance of approximately five miles.

The community-specific strategies and recommendations evolved from the initial publicly-generated needs and a thorough technical analysis. The intermediate step between the needs identification and final strategies and recommendations was the development of planning concepts. Several iterations of the planning concepts were developed in response to public review, consistency with the EIS improvements, and WisDOT/SEH review.

To assist the local governments with the implementation of the strategies and recommendations, the concepts have been grouped together by map. In some instances, the communities were split between two maps. For example, the city of Milton appears on Maps 1 and 2. Grouping communities together by map is advantageous because it will allow neighboring communities to review each other's strategies and recommendations and gain a greater understanding of the regional impact of local decisions. It will also help the communities collaboratively identify ways to address the strategies and recommendations.

Plan Implementation

The STH 26 Corridor Plan is an advisory document that establishes both corridor-wide and community-specific strategies and recommendations. Implementation of the majority of the strategies and recommendations should occur within ten years but many of the strategies should be implemented sooner (within the next three years).

Communities receiving the Corridor Plan should review the community-specific strategies and recommendations. Maps from the Corridor Plan should be used at plan commission, city council, village board, and town meetings.

Community issues were identified by representatives attending the project-hosted Transportation/Land Use Planning Conference held in August 2003. Implementation breakout groups identified priorities that could be pursued by individual communities, and/or as a cooperative effort within the next several years.

One year after the STH 26 Corridor Plan is completed, WisDOT plans to meet with all of the STH 26 communities. The purpose of this meeting will be to check-in with STH 26 communities on the strategy and recommendation implementation.